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**The Authoritarian Welfare State:  
a Marginalized Concept**

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## The Authoritarian Welfare State: a Marginalized Concept

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### **Abstract**

The central thesis of the paper is that authoritarian cases have systematically been excluded from welfare state theories despite the existing empirical research on authoritarian welfare provisions. This theoretical gap has limited the instruments available for comparative welfare state research. As a result, such research has attended to the democratic mechanisms of welfare state development and has ignored the authoritarian ones. This is most consequential for studying the countries with hybrid political regimes where democratic theories reveal only a part of the story. Building the theory of the authoritarian welfare state can help develop a more comprehensive model of the welfare state that will not be biased towards the democratic cases. The paper explores the possible reasons for the exclusion of authoritarian cases from theory building, provides a sketch of the theory of the authoritarian welfare state, and demonstrates the potential benefits of the expanded theoretical framework using the recent examples of comparative welfare state research.

### **Author's bio**

Natalia Forrat is a PhD candidate in Sociology at Northwestern University. She possesses an MA in Higher Education from the University of Michigan and a Specialist Degree in Sociology from Tomsk State University, Russia. Her research interests include political and economic sociology, public policy under non-democratic regimes, postcommunist transformations, and comparative social research.

Common wisdom in Western social science tells us that the welfare state has an intrinsic connection to civil rights (Marshall 1950, 10–11; Orloff 1993). Unlike the poor relief measures, characteristic of pre-industrial societies, the contemporary welfare state emerged when the challenges of industrialization and urbanization in Western Europe and the United States combined with the new concept of individual rights, stemming from the American and French revolutions (Rimlinger 1971; Kuhnle and Sander 2010). Social and demographic changes that accompanied industrialization generated demand for welfare programs, and the inclusion of large population groups into politics in one or the other way facilitated bringing these demands to the political agenda. Many scholars agree that emergence of social rights is the result of prior institutionalization of political citizenship rights (Kuhnle and Sander 2010, 78), or, in other words, that the contemporary welfare state would have been impossible without democratization.

The causal link between democratization and the development of the welfare state has been widely criticized because of its inability to account for the ‘historical oddity’ that the first comprehensive welfare programs were introduced not by democracies, but by monarchies (see, for example, Skocpol and Orloff 1986, 234–235; Esping-Andersen 1990, 15; Piven and Cloward 1993, 429). Being a convenient counterargument against the pluralist democratic perspective, however, this oddity has not shifted the researchers’ attention away from democratic countries. The connection to democracy stays embedded into the concept of the welfare state and serves as a divider between what qualifies as such and what does not (Walker and Wong, Chack-kie 2005, 4)<sup>1</sup>.

Meanwhile, welfare has been provided to the population by non-democratic states all the way through since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As I just mentioned, scholars of the welfare state are well aware of the fact that the first comprehensive social insurance program was introduced by Bismarck in Imperial Germany in 1883. He borrowed the idea of using universal male suffrage to support the authoritarian state from Napoleon III and the Second French Empire, where Bismarck served as a Prussian ambassador. Bismarckian social insurance policies aimed at building workers’ loyalty to the state. (Rimlinger 1971). A few years after Germany, the government of Eduard von Taaffe introduced the first bill on workers’ sickness insurance in Austria, which was adopted in 1888 (Jenks 1965, 218). This happened a decade earlier than the first industrial accident insurance was promulgated in England and more than two decades earlier than the first similar laws were adopted in the United States (Skocpol and Orloff 1986, 239).

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Flora and Heidenheimer (1981a, 22) have cut off the German Empire from the family of welfare states: “The real beginning of the modern welfare state, however, had to await the transformation of the absolutist state into mass democracy ... .” Similarly, Orloff (2009) uses democracy as the first checkpoint to start looking for a system of social provision: “As democratization and development have proceeded in other parts of the world – East Asia and Latin America – one finds emerging or expanding systems of social provision, too, ... . There are not systems that can actually claim to be welfare states in much of the global South, ... ”.

The Soviet Union also engaged in substantial redistribution practices, which included providing social services to the population. The Russian term “*sotsial’noe obespechenie*”<sup>2</sup> was officially used since 1918, long before “*social security*” came into usage in the United States in the 1930s (Rimlinger 1971, 2). Nazi Germany significantly restructured the national welfare system in the 1930s to serve the goals of the National Socialist state (Rimlinger 1987). In the post-World War II era, the Soviet workers had access to “major policy goods – full and secure employment, rising real incomes, and socialized human services – which have remained inaccessible to the best-organized labor movements in the industrialized world” (Cook 1993, 1). Pre-reform Maoist China had launched many essential social policies (Dixon 1981; Walker and Wong 2005; Saich 2008). And many non-democratic countries in the Middle East and North Africa have achieved quite remarkable improvements in health and educational indicators after the 1960s (Karshenas and Moghadam 2006b). Of course, these countries have spent less for welfare provisions than their economically developed contemporaries, both in absolute terms and, probably, in terms of percentage of GDP. Low expenditures, however, have not prevented conceptualizing the insurance programs in Europe and the United States in late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century as welfare states, even if at the initial stages of their development. Moreover, if the size of the welfare state was measured not by the share of GDP, but by the share of public consumption in the total consumption, socialist countries had two to three times bigger welfare states than the capitalist ones (Kornai 1992, 314).

I argue in this essay that non-democratic countries have been excluded from the theoretical conceptualization of the welfare state, and this exclusion has significantly narrowed the methodological instruments at the disposal of welfare state scholars. While the phenomenon of authoritarian welfare states was not ignored by social scientists, these studies mostly stayed confined to the field of history (see the works of Rimlinger 1971; Dixon 1981; Rimlinger 1987; Beck 1995) or area studies (Cook 1993;

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<sup>2</sup> Social provision

Cook 2007; Cook, Orenstein, and Rueschemeyer 1999; Walker and Wong 2005; Karshenas and Moghadam 2006b; Saich 2008). The few comparative studies that did include non-democratic countries have either concluded that the political regime did not play a significant role in the welfare state development (Wilensky 1974) or concentrated on the questions of whether democracy led to an increase in welfare spending or not (Haggard and Kaufman 2008). Both welfare state classifications that are most frequently used by researchers – Esping-Andersen’s liberal, corporatist, and social democratic welfare states (1990, 26–27) and the more popular in Europe distinction between Bismarckian and Beveridgean systems – are concentrated on democracies<sup>3</sup>. The distinction of productivist and protectionist welfare states (Rudra 2008), developed for the third world countries, addresses the governmental strategies towards globalization rather than the link of welfare to the political regime. The need for more studies paying attention to the influence of the political regime on the welfare state has recently been pointed out by several scholars (Haggard and Kaufman 2008; Nullmeier and Kaufmann 2010).

In this paper, I will first discuss the reasons for excluding non-democratic countries from the scholarship on welfare states. Then, I will sketch the main lines, along which a concept of an authoritarian welfare state can be developed, and demonstrate its potential analytical benefits using the example of postcommunist countries. I will conclude with the discussion of the reasons why Western scholars should theorize the authoritarian welfare state.

### **Why is there a bias against authoritarian regimes?**

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<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, Esping-Andersen (1987) included in the volume he edited a historical piece on Nazi Germany and a chapter on Hungary that was in the process of transition from communism at that time. Nevertheless, his famous classification of the three worlds of welfare capitalism that came out few years later did not apply to non-democracies (Esping-Andersen 1990).

Multiple factors have likely contributed to the exclusion of authoritarian cases from the theories of the welfare state. Social science in general is concentrated in and on North America and Europe (Connell 2007), and the countries in these regions are capitalist democracies. Language barriers also stand in the way of comparative research. Castles et al. (2010, 3) point out that the English literature on foreign nations is an “iceberg phenomenon”, i.e., many national literatures are hardly available in English. Goodman and Peng (1996, 192) write about the language difficulties in studying East Asian welfare systems by Western scholars and practitioners. The popularity of the comparison between the United States and Great Britain in social sciences can be explained not only by the historical importance of these two nations, but also by the easy accessibility of both primary and secondary sources in English. Since not very many sources on authoritarian countries are available in English, a rational Western scholar would probably choose not to look their way. At the end the dissertation and tenure clocks are no different for those conducting research in their native language and those trying to master a foreign one.

Regardless of the language, however, authoritarian countries are harder to study than democracies. Political processes in authoritarian regimes are often deliberately hidden from the public, government sources tend to be less reliable, “[m]edia outlets are often censored, government propaganda is widespread, and details of government administration are concealed” (Ezrow and Frantz 2011, xiv). The students of authoritarian countries are much more at the mercy of their sources than the students of democracies. Meeting the standards of empirical verification may be challenging, which is another understandable reason for not choosing an authoritarian country for one’s comparative research.

Western hegemony, language barriers, and the closeness of authoritarian regimes all reduce the number of studies based on non-democratic cases. The question, however, remains, why the existing

research on welfare in authoritarian countries has been systematically excluded from theory building. I think that one of the causes of this situation may lie in American politics.

While social scientists in the United States stress the connection of the welfare state to civil rights, American conservatives eagerly recognize the connection between welfare and authoritarianism in their rhetoric. The expression “authoritarian welfare state” is almost impossible to find in the English-speaking academic world<sup>4</sup>, but the conservative American media use it quite frequently<sup>5</sup>. It’s a fair guess to say that any academic research that would dare to make the authoritarian state providing welfare to the population its main theme could have been easily picked up and reinterpreted by the conservative journalists and politicians. The odds of that would be even greater if this research was not an empirical study of a remote country, but a theoretical model providing scientific explanation of why authoritarian states implement welfare policies. Given that the majority of American academics are democrats (Gross and Fosse 2012), sympathetic to social movements and concerned about different kinds of inequalities in society, this is definitely not the outcome they would like their research to serve. Juxtaposition of temporal trends in political rhetoric and academic research would help find out if this hypothesis holds true.

Political considerations may have influenced welfare state scholarship since its emergence in the late 1960s and the 1970s. At the time when the founding works on the welfare state were written (the

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<sup>4</sup> The only source to date that has the phrase “authoritarian welfare state” in the title is Beck, Hermann. 1995. *The Origins of the Authoritarian Welfare State in Prussia: Conservatives, Bureaucracy, and the Social Question, 1815-70*. Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

<sup>5</sup> I am not aware of a study that would systematically assess the connection between authoritarianism and the welfare state in the rhetoric of American conservatives. But even a quick internet search can easily bring up a few recent examples: Chantrill, Christopher “Riots and Civil Society.” *American Thinker*, August 20, 2011. [http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/./2011/08/riots\\_and\\_civil\\_society.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/./2011/08/riots_and_civil_society.html); Devito, Ron. “Gov. Palin on Bolling: GOP Must Contrast; 1st Dude Went Rogue.” *Sarah Palin Information Blog*, January 10, 2012. <https://sarahpalininformation.wordpress.com/2012/01/10/gov-palin-on-bolling-gop-must-contrast-1st-dude-went-rogue/>; Kristol, Irving. “The Coming Clash of Welfare States.” *American Outlook - Sagamore Institute*, February 1, 1999. <http://www.sagamoreinstitute.org/ao/index/article/id/1242>; Larson, Sven R. “Saving the Welfare State: From Austerity to Authoritarianism.” *The Liberty Bullhorn*, March 28, 2012. <http://libertybullhorn.com/2012/03/28/saving-the-welfare-state-from-austerity-to-authoritarianism/>; Larson, Sven R. “Europe: From the Welfare State to the Totalitarian State?” *Conservative Daily News*, April 30, 2012. <http://www.conservativedailynews.com/2012/04/europe-from-the-welfare-state-to-the-totalitarian-state/>.

1970s-80s), the political environment of the Cold War was most adverse to including authoritarian cases into welfare state scholarship. This was not only because of internal political cleavages in the United States, but also because of the general influence of the world geopolitical order on social science, to which I turn in the next section of the paper.

### **The three worlds and welfare state scholarship**

In the second half of the twentieth century for many politicians and scholars the world was divided into three parts: the capitalist Western (First) world, the communist Soviet (Second) world, and the rest (Third) of the world consisting mostly of the postcolonial bloc of nations (McMichael 2008, 43). The primary criterion of this division was the economy – either its type or the level of its development. Capitalism and socialism were the two options in the economically developed world, and the other countries were developing, i.e. catching up.

Social science in general and welfare state scholarship in particular was profoundly influenced by this global division. Scholars admitted that communist countries did have extensive welfare states, but most agreed that “the “communist welfare state” should (...) be analyzed as a *unique* phenomenon shaped by Marxist-Leninist ideology and the skewed logic of the command economy” (Inglot 2008, 22). For example, in his famous study, Rimlinger (1971) viewed the capitalist West and the communist East as alternative economic systems and discussed the functions of social security under the free market and the centrally planned command economy separately, as serving different goals under different circumstances.

Several topics were usually discussed in relation to the communist welfare state. It was analyzed as “the authorities’ second main set of instruments for influencing income distribution” (McAuley 1979,



260) along with regulated wages (see also Leung and Nann 1995, xxi). The global competition with capitalism was discernible in the discussions of shortages of goods and lagging behind the capitalist countries in consumption quantities (Kornai 1992, 302–311) as well as in questioning the ability of the Soviet leadership to translate the declared social goals into reality (Nechemias 1980).

Capitalist and communist systems differed both on economic and political grounds. Moreover, politics was indistinguishable from the economy. Although both the capitalist West and the communist East could be considered to have a developed welfare state that matured under very different political settings, the incompatibility of the two systems resulted in exclusion of the main authoritarian case of the twentieth century from the theories connecting the welfare state and the political regime.

#### *The democratic welfare state theory*

The bulk of theoretical work in comparative welfare state research during the Cold War era was concentrated on explaining the emergence of the welfare state and the divergent trajectories of Western countries. Political factors played one of the major roles in the explanatory models along with cultural ones (Castles 1993; Rueschemeyer and Skocpol 1996). Piven and Cloward (1993, 422) identify three main lines of analysis within this tradition: the first “points to the significance of class-based electoral organization” (see, for example, Korpi 1983; Esping-Andersen 1990), the second “emphasizes the influence of electoral-representative institutions and the voters and political parties they bring into being” (Marshall 1950; Flora and Heidenheimer 1981b), the third “focuses on the impact of state structures and state elites” (Orloff and Skocpol 1984).

All three of them were developed for democracies and are applicable only in the context where democratic political institutions exist. This is most apparent for the second line of analysis that explicitly concentrates on electoral-representative institutions. I also agree with Piven and Cloward that the first group of arguments, although departing from class conflict, focuses “specifically on electoral

representative arrangements as the formative institutional context within which this conflict is played out” (Piven and Cloward 1993, 425). The state-centered perspective, however, does not look very engaged with democratic institutions at the first glance. Inglot (2008, 35) writes that the state-centered<sup>6</sup> approach in social policy studies “indirectly opened the door” for studying countries with strong statist traditions because it revealed the autonomy of government bureaucrats, policy experts, and politicians from societal groups, unions, and political parties.

On the one hand, this is true. On the other hand, I still think that the state-centered theory is oriented towards democracies and the research agenda it represents is only viable in a democratic context. The state-centered approach to welfare state development is a part of a larger project of “bringing the state back in” to social science scholarship (Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol 1985). Its very goal is to show that despite the stable and powerful democratic institutions, state structures still exercise significant influence on the policymaking process. The case choice also reflects this goal of the state-centered paradigm. For example, Skocpol and Orloff (1986, 238) justify the choice of Britain and the United States as comparison cases by their perfect fit to the society-centered theories and, therefore, their stronger potential as a counterevidence in the debate of the state-centered approach with those theories.

The goal of “bringing the state back in”, however, is irrelevant in the authoritarian context. There, the state has never been out of people’s lives, thoughts, or scholarly work, and democratic institutions have been absent, rudimentary, or malfunctioning. There is no similar tension between the democratic institutions and the potentially autonomous state. While the state-centered approach is better suited for studying authoritarian cases than the pluralist or power resources theories, it falls short of uncovering the internal dynamics of authoritarianism or explaining the variation among authoritarian welfare states.

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<sup>6</sup> He calls it “the institutionalist school”.

### *Development, welfare, and political regimes*

With the economic reforms in China and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Second world stopped being an alternative to capitalism and democracy. With only the First and the Third worlds left, the modernization paradigm was reinforced once again. Studies of social policies in developing countries could frequently be found in the category of 'development studies', and they viewed welfare policies in conjunction with economic development. Better economic performance was assumed to be a necessary condition for extending welfare, and some social policies, such as health care and education, were seen as influencing economic performance. Just like welfare in the Second world, welfare in the Third world was taken up by the larger economic issues.

The question of the influence of the political regime on 'development' became particularly acute because of the economic growth in Asia, the example of Chile, and the issues of postcommunist transformations in Eastern Europe. Scholars have discussed under which conditions authoritarian countries may produce economic growth and what features of authoritarianism may bring economic advantage to a country in the global market. The ability of the government to implement the necessary economic reforms without being held back by the popular interests was usually seen as one of the mechanisms connecting authoritarianism to the economic growth (Wintrobe 1998, 338). A similar argument was also made in favor of the 'shock therapy' in Eastern Europe.

The examples of economic growth of authoritarian countries have also called for additional arguments to reaffirm the connection between democracy and economic performance, which were traditionally connected through the liberal social philosophy and the ideas of rights and freedoms. The recent works have used economic institutionalism to reestablish this connection (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012).

While the causal relationship between authoritarianism and economic growth has been researched, expansion of the welfare state both in the developed and developing countries was usually viewed solely as a result of democracy or democratization<sup>7</sup>. Table 1 schematically represents the array of theories addressing political regime influence on economic growth and the expansion of the welfare state. Cells 1 and 2 are related to the development agenda, and these theories track the mechanisms of how both democracy and authoritarianism may produce economic growth. Cell 3 encompasses the democratic theory of the welfare state as discussed above. Cell 4 should have been filled with a theory describing how an authoritarian state can produce welfare, but no theoretical tradition to date has addressed this question. This cell represents exactly the theoretical gap that is the subject of this paper.

**Table 1. Theories connecting democracy and authoritarianism to economic growth and expansion of the welfare state**

Dependent variables	Independent variables	
	Democracy	Authoritarianism
Economic growth ('development' agenda)	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>1</b></p> <p>Democracy → Economic growth (classic liberalism + economic institutionalist approach)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>2</b></p> <p>Authoritarianism → Economic growth (state capitalism; authoritarian capitalism)</p>
Expansion of the welfare state	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>3</b></p> <p>Democracy → Expansion of the welfare state (pluralist, power resources, and state-centered approaches)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>4</b></p> <p>Authoritarianism → Expansion of the welfare state  <b>?</b></p>

<sup>7</sup> I only refer here to the studies considering political factors. Besides them, of course, the influences of economy, ideology and other possible causes have been addressed.

One book, however, is worth attention as potentially providing a common framework for thinking about the authoritarian welfare state – it is *The Political Economy of Dictatorship* by Ronald Wintrobe (1998). Wintrobe does not talk about the welfare state per se; he analyzes the interplay of politics and economics in dictatorships. The model he proposes, however, suggests several theoretically grounded mechanisms of welfare provision by dictatorships.

Wintrobe works within the rational choice theory framework. He classifies dictators into four types depending on the preferences of the dictator for money or for power and the level of loyalty of the population. These four types are a tinpot, a totalitarian, a tyrant, and a timocrat. Each of these types is characterized by a set of dynamic patterns of interrelationships between power, money, loyalty, and repression. Providing public goods is in the interest of the dictator (1) if it increases the loyalty of the population and (2) if it promotes general economic growth, increases the revenue of the private sector, and the dictator's budget depends on the economic performance of the private sector. The second option is particularly characteristic of the ruler who starts from very low levels of power (Wintrobe 1998, 114). Wintrobe also discusses a theoretical possibility of altruistic motives of the dictator, but acknowledges that such a person will probably never exist in the history of humanity. Wintrobe's models are purposefully very abstract as he argues that much depends on the historical circumstances and the nature of institutions in different societies. In the historical chapters of his book, he shows how the models he suggests can be applied to Nazi Germany, Soviet communism, South Africa under apartheid, the ancient Roman Empire, and Pinochet's Chile.

### **The authoritarian welfare state: lines of conceptualization**

The only model existing today that is developed enough to be used as a methodological lens for comparative studies is the model of the democratic welfare state. There is no alternative tool that would have a comparable influence on comparative scholarship, and this gap limits the explanatory potential of social research.

Below I present several lines of conceptualization of the authoritarian welfare state to start filling this gap. These are patterns of welfare provisions by authoritarian states that can be traced in the existing literature and that can serve as a stepping stone to the development of a more coherent model of the authoritarian welfare state. The purpose of presenting these lines is to show that the authoritarian welfare state has some essence that is not a mere denial of its democratic version. To really develop a theory of the authoritarian welfare state, however, a joint effort of the scholars studying social policy in different authoritarian countries is needed.

When conceptualizing of the authoritarian welfare state, one should keep in mind the variability of authoritarian regimes that is not smaller than the variability of democracies. Just like the welfare states of Scandinavian countries are very different from the one in the United States, authoritarian welfare states are likely to have different structures and be maintained by different mechanisms. It is possible, however, to discern several lines of analysis that constitute a common framework, along which the concept of the authoritarian welfare state can be subsequently developed.

### *1. Paternalism*

The idea that the ruler and the state elites are responsible for taking care of the masses lay at the heart of German welfare programs and was present in other cases of welfare provision by authoritarian states. Beck (1995, viii), who studied “the mental makeup of Prussian conservatives and officials”, claims that “(a)uthority and benevolence are the terms that capture best the Prussian state’s

attitude toward its subjects”<sup>8</sup>. Exactly the same words are used by Leung and Nann (1995) to describe the system of social welfare in communist China. Kornai (1992, 55, 315) describes the power of the Soviet state as paternalistic in nature: even broad mass opposition could not “serve as evidence for the claim that a section of the people do not support those in power. The party knows better than the people itself what the people's interest demands ... .” In some countries of the MENA region, the state-labor relations are also based on a paternalist rationale (World Bank 2004, 23).

Paternalism implies the division of the society into the elites and the masses where the latter need guidance and protection and the former are capable of it. In the extreme case, the elites act out of mercy and benevolence and the masses pay back with obedience and gratitude. Such an arrangement is as old as the world (Rimlinger 1971, 8), and it is extremely viable. The Enlightenment has fundamentally challenged this mental and societal structure, but has not made it disappear. Paternalism is probably different in the industrial era compared to the earlier historical periods; the elite status may not be inherited and the masses need more protection from the new kinds of risks. However, there is nothing fundamentally incompatible between capitalism and paternalism.

Paternalism may be viewed as a part of the mentality of the ruler and the ruled, or as an ideology legitimizing the political regime and the power structure in society. In the same way as the ideas of civil rights, freedom, and equality served as an ideological justification for the expansion of the welfare state in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Western world, paternalism might have been used in other countries by both the authoritarian state – to claim obedience of the population – and its subjects – to demand protection.

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<sup>8</sup> The same attitude was also characteristic of at least some of the capitalists in Prussia. For example, Carl Ferdinand Stumm, an iron and steel magnate, was also a leading spokesman for compulsory state insurance. In his words, “since the worker owes obedience to his employer, the latter is obligated, by God and by law, to care for the worker far beyond the limits of the labor contract. The employer should consider himself as the head of a large family whose individual members are entitled to his care and protection so long as they prove themselves worthy.” (Rimlinger 1971, 109)

## 2. *The welfare state originating from authoritarian state-building*

When authoritarian states provide welfare, state interests take precedence over particular group interests. Rimlinger (1971, 9) points at the example of Bismarckian policies that were motivated by the need to secure the loyalty of the industrial worker to the monarchy. "The social insurance legislation of the 1880s made social and economic relations among individuals an object of statecraft. It was a conscious attempt at cementing the social fabric of the industrial order, with the interests of the state instead of the welfare of the worker as the prime objective" (Rimlinger 1971, 93). The Soviet Union was another case where the interests of the ruling party had always been a dominant factor in the shaping of the country's social security programs (Rimlinger 1971, 9). The researchers of social policy of the MENA region also notice the link between the development of welfare on the one hand and state and nation-building in the post-colonial era on the other (Karshenas and Moghadam 2006a, 4).

Welfare policies serve the goal of state-building by creating a social base of support for the existing or emerging political regimes. Researchers sometimes use the concept of social contract (Breslauer 1978; Cook 1993; World Bank 2004; Haggard and Kaufman 2008) to designate such clientelistic relationship, despite the original connections of this concept to the liberal philosophy. The social contract in this context means "a tacit agreement to trade social security for political compliance" (Cook 1993, 1). Such a contract with industrial workers was the goal of Bismarck reforms and of the many policies implemented by the Soviet leadership. Obtaining the support of the working and the middle class was likely the motivation underlying the establishment of special entitlements to government workers and the land reform in Nasser's Egypt and in Iran under the Shah (Karshenas and Moghadam 2006a, 4). The political elites in Latin America provided welfare to the urban working class to solidify crucial basis of political support in the cities (Haggard and Kaufman 2008, 71).

Securing this kind of support is essential for an authoritarian state since repression alone can never guarantee regime stability and should always be combined with mechanisms to secure loyalty



(Wintrobe 1998). Hermann Wagener, Bismarck's adviser on social issues, pointed exactly at the connection of this critical need of the authoritarian state to the social needs of the lower classes when he wrote: "All kingship will henceforth be a hollow shadow, or mere despotism, or it will degenerate into a republic, if it does not muster the high moral courage to become a kingship of social reform" (Beck 1995, 104). Regardless of moral courage, however, the alliance with workers was also of pragmatic interest to the Prussian state since it allowed using the proletariat as an instrument against the potential challenger of the authoritarian rule – the liberal bourgeoisie (Rimlinger 1971).

### *3. Authoritarian policymaking: the proactive role of the elites and protests as feedback*

In authoritarian regimes policymaking is the prerogative of the elite (Ezrow and Frantz 2011). Unlike the social policy in democracies, which is usually a result of the activities of social movements, organized interests, unions, and parties, authoritarian policymaking is largely based on the proactive role of the elites who may take preventive actions in anticipation of the future problems. In this context, protests are signals for the elites indicating the presence of popular discontent and the need for some change, rather than organized social movements with a developed political agenda.

For example, in Prussia welfare policies emerged as a result not of the political struggle of the lower classes, but of an elite's concern about the potential social issues. While the trigger of these concerns came from below<sup>9</sup>, the elite's vision of the problem was shaped by the experiences of industrialization in England and France, not the current issues in Prussia (Rimlinger 1971, 91). The policies, therefore, were an attempt to avoid or alleviate similar issues in the future. In Austria-Hungary, protests also served as signals of discontent as "workers' demonstrations around the turn of the century made the leading elite believe that social insurance would pacify the working class" (Cerami and Vanhuysse 2009, 20).

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<sup>9</sup> Rimlinger writes that "(t)he riots of the Silesian weavers in the summer of 1844 were a major factor in awakening the public conscience to the existence of the social problems of industrial change" (Rimlinger 1971, 99).

The history of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe also provides a good example of authoritarian policymaking. The social contract in the communist countries “was by no means the result of democratic politics, or even bargaining with affected interests” (Cerami and Vanhuysse 2009, 224). Nechemias (1980, 177) claims that the fear of popular unrest was the motivation of the Soviet leadership for extending welfare. Cook (1993, 3) cites Seweryn Bialer who wrote of the Brezhnev policies in the late 1970s: "The responsiveness by the leadership to certain aspirations ... can be described as an anticipatory reaction with regard to workers, that is to say, a response not to their actual behavior but to the leadership's fear that if the interests of the workers [were] not sufficiently considered, their behavior might [have] become disruptive and dangerous... Only at this price [could the party] continue to ... withhold much of political freedom, and preserve political stability." Interestingly, some democratically elected postcommunist governments acting in the situation of rapid institutional transformation, have also followed a similar anticipatory logic of avoiding popular protests (Vanhuysse 2006).

The proactive role of the elites also means that the preferences, mentality, and the personality of the rulers are important to understand the authoritarian welfare state and authoritarian politics in general. Wintrobe (1998) treats the dictator’s preference for power or for consumption as one of the most important variables in his analysis and as the basis to distinguish different types of dictatorships<sup>10</sup>.

#### *4. Welfare and social policy as a means of political control*

Authoritarian elites may use social policy in a variety of ways to regulate the political threats to the regime. They are known to have remunerated disproportionately the social groups that can potentially threaten the status of the ruling elite. Cook (1993) has demonstrated that in the Soviet Union industrial workers have benefited from a number of social policies that were not available to the

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<sup>10</sup> The need to attend to the psychological aspects of power was also emphasized by Steinmetz (2007) in his study of German colonies.

majority of the population. Unlike in democracies, however, this was not a result of a strong labor movement and political efforts of organized labor unions. It was rather the social contract, already mentioned above. The Soviet industrial workers were in the position to threaten the regime, had they wished so, and their loyalty was of utmost importance to the Soviet state elites. Breslauer (1978) calls the political regime of the Brezhnev Era in the Soviet Union “the welfare state authoritarianism” because of the concessions the regime had to make to mitigate social and political tensions. Similarly, in communist China the state provided benefits for industrial workers, while welfare in rural areas was locally based (Leung and Nann 1995). The restraining function of welfare in these cases resembles a similar function of the poor relief measures in the pre-industrial era and even in some democracies with weakly organized labor (Rimlinger 1971; Piven and Cloward 1993).

The military and the government bureaucracy are also the groups strategically important for the stability of an authoritarian regime. They are not only in the position to threaten the status quo of the elites, but they also maintain the daily operation of the state, which makes their loyalty even more important (Kornai 1992, 325).

Creation of wide governmental structures providing public goods may also benefit the authoritarian state by limiting the organizational capacities potentially available for regime challengers. Rimlinger (1971) notes that in Prussia conservative capitalists who sided on many questions with the authoritarian state, favored the centralized social protection system in the mining industry over mutual assistance funds because the former gave the employer a dominant administrative position, and in the latter workers were in charge. Monopolizing the direction of organized workers’ activity (unions) was also one of the main ways to control them by the Soviet state (Cook 1993, 11).

Social control can also be exercised through an educational system that may perform recruitment and screening functions for the governmental jobs. In the societies where ideology, religion, or ethnic culture play a significant role in fostering the national unity, the centrally controlled

educational system may be of a great help to an authoritarian leader (Karshenas and Moghadam 2006a, 4).

##### *5. Welfare as a means of economic development*

Wintrobe (1998) shows that the provision of public goods may be in the interest of a dictator if they have a positive effect on economic performance and, therefore, indirectly increase the amount of resources a dictator can extract from the economy. There are multiple historical facts that seem to fit this logic. For example, Nechemias (1980) shows that during the Stalinist era in the Soviet Union health and education of the workforce were regarded as crucial for economic development. The conditions for labor productivity growth stayed a concern for the Soviet leadership even in the post-Stalinist period. Among the contemporary examples, Asian governments are particularly notable for their developmental concerns and tuning their welfare states towards economic development more than towards mitigating economic hardships (Haggard and Kaufman 2008; Rudra 2008)

##### *6. Legitimacy of the authoritarian state and legitimation of social policy*

Authoritarian governments lack the procedural legitimacy of their democratic counterparts and therefore have a particular need in maintaining their own legitimacy. Welfare programs may play a dual role here. First, they may help maintain the legitimacy of the particular government. For example, Cook (1993) shows that the economic welfare of the Soviet workers was the basis of the state legitimacy, and once this social contract was broken, the workers revealed their discontent. Second, welfare may require legitimation itself. While in the Western countries the main legitimation of welfare in the concept of civil rights, in a non-democratic context other ideas like religion, nation-building, particular economic paradigm, may play a leading role in assigning meaning to welfare (Nullmeier and Kaufmann 2010).

### *The theoretical synthesis needed*

Developing of a theory of the authoritarian welfare state should not be viewed as a terminal goal. I think it should rather serve as a strategic instrument for breaking the monopoly of the democratic version of the welfare state, laying bare its implicit connection with democracy, and developing a more comprehensive theory connecting the welfare state to politics that would not be confined to the welfare state concept based on civil rights. Such a theory would juxtapose democratic and authoritarian versions of the welfare state and see them as two different responses to the challenges of industrialization and economic globalization. It will also address their relationships in the course of historical development. Did they develop separately or did they interact within one nation state? How did they interact within or across national borders? Could they transform into one another and under what conditions? At the end the distinction between authoritarian and democratic welfare states may or may not prove useful within this more comprehensive theory connecting the welfare state to politics. Nevertheless, I think that the way to this comprehensive theory lies through theorizing of the authoritarian welfare state as an alternative to the democratic one.

Since the synthesis implies comparison of the democratic and the authoritarian welfare states, several questions that may inform this comparison are worth noting. First, it is important to problematize the concept of rights in relation to the welfare state. It would be hard to argue with Rimlinger (1971, 8) that the perception of the problem of want in the industrial era is fundamentally different from the one in traditional society. This change has made any social security program in the industrial society very different from the old-type poor laws. The mercy of the upper classes as a basis of social support has gradually been replaced with the right of all citizens for some kind of social protection. It is rarely questioned, however, if the right meant the same everywhere. For example, Beck (1995, 163) claims that when social insurance was introduced in Germany, the state bureaucrats

specifically noted that this did not mean that citizens could sue the state for not providing welfare. Although the arbitrariness of the pre-industrial arrangements was significantly diminished by the public commitment of the state to provide universal insurance coverage for workers, the German state still acted in a very patronizing way. Rimlinger (1971, 112) confirms that when he writes that “the preservation of the traditional relationship of the individual to the state” was exactly the Bismarck’s goal. The relationship between rights and obligations is also important in this regard. What kind of obligations do people owe in exchange for rights? Paying taxes? Political participation? Obedience? Or none? In the Turkish case, for example, “the implicit motto” of social policy before 1946 was “giving without taking”(Karshenas and Moghadam 2006a, 22), while “class consciousness, trade unions and socialistic tendencies were deviations that had to be strictly prevented” (Boratav and Özüğurlu 2006, 167) Even if the rhetoric of rights is present, it is important to look into its meaning and tradeoffs in the particular case.

Second, the different kind of social protests and their role in advancing authoritarian and the democratic welfare state should be explored. Robertson (2010) has shown that the nature of protest in a non-democratic regime is quite different from the one in democracies. Protests are not always backed by an organized social movement and do not always represent a move towards democracy. They may be orchestrated from above and integrated into the broader political strategies of the elites. It is very likely, therefore, that different kinds of protest would have varying effects on social policy.

Third, the role of bureaucracy in the development of the authoritarian and democratic welfare state should be disentangled. In democracies bureaucratic apparatus can serve as an instrument of policymaking and policy implementation or as an autonomous actor in these processes. In authoritarian context bureaucracy may occupy a different position. For example, Rimlinger (1971, 92) describes the Prussian bureaucracy as an institution that maintained its dominant policy-making position even after the advent of popularly elected parliaments and political parties. Moreover, by claiming to represent the

interests of the state against the conflicting interests of individuals and groups, it successfully inherited an important aspect of the concept of monarchical absolutism – “that the prince is the supreme arbiter of the national interest over and above the conflicting claims of his subjects.”

### **Postcommunist welfare states: the merit and the limitations of the democratic welfare state model**

Using the model of the authoritarian welfare state as an alternative is particularly beneficial for studying countries with hybrid political regimes<sup>11</sup>. The democratic model of the welfare state has probably never been applied to hard authoritarian cases, and even if such an attempt was made, the inadequacy of the tool for the task would be immediately obvious. The countries with hybrid regimes, on the contrary, possess the formal democratic institutions, which make the application of the democratic model both possible and tempting. While there is nothing inherently wrong with doing it, the very nature of a hybrid political regime tells us that democratic policymaking mechanisms are probably not the only ones that are in place in these countries. The theory of the authoritarian welfare state would help capture the missed side of things and create a more balanced and adequate picture.

Scholars have pointed multiple times at the issues related to using the Western welfare state theory for studying welfare in postcommunist countries. Most frequently they talk about inapplicability of Esping-Andersen’s typology of welfare state regimes (Inglot 2008; Cook 2007; Golinowska, Hengstenberg, and Zukowski 2009; Szikra and Tomka 2009; Aidukaite 2009). Inglot (2008) has convincingly demonstrated that contemporary Eastern European welfare states are a result of institutional layering that started with the Bismarckian system inherited from the Austro-Hungarian empire and topped with a democratic-like arrangement after the fall of communism. Cook et al. (1999,

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<sup>11</sup> I mean the regimes that combine the elements of authoritarianism and democracy.

243) describe the welfare state in the Soviet Union and Russia as a combination of the Bismarckian and Beveridgean systems. Fitting the postcommunist welfare states into the existing typologies seems to be particularly complicated because of swiping institutional transformations in the past two decades.

A more general democratic framework, however, proved to be useful for understanding postcommunist welfare states. Parties, coalition politics, the support of trade unions, interest groups, and ideological cleavages in the parliaments and governments are frequently discussed in relation to the development of social policy in the region (Cook, Orenstein, and Rueschemeyer 1999; McFaul 1999; Haggard and Kaufman 2008; Inglot 2008; Cerami and Vanhuysse 2009). These studies have indeed shown how the newly created political institutions and the peculiarities of historical situation have influenced the development of social policy after the fall of communism.

Two recent comparative studies can demonstrate the role of the democratic model of the welfare state and the need for an authoritarian one particularly well. Both of these works include authoritarian as well as democratic cases and address the influence of the political regime on the welfare state. The first one is a comparison of welfare states in Latin America, East Asia, and Eastern Europe by Haggard and Kaufman (2008). The authors make an explicit attempt to extend the welfare state scholarship beyond Western capitalist democracies by bringing together three non-Western regions. They also pose the question of the influence of the political regime on the welfare state and try to account for the length of democratic, semidemocratic, and authoritarian rule in the country in their regression models. They even touch upon some issues discussed above when they analyze how social policy in Latin American and East Asia has served the needs of the political elites (Haggard and Kaufman 2008, 71).

Nevertheless, the authors' methodology is rooted "in an approach that emphasizes the causal significance of organized interests" (Haggard and Kaufman 2008, 22). They concentrate on the role of the left parties and labor unions, i.e., on the bottom-up pressures for welfare concessions from the



elites. Their main question regarding the influence of the regime type is the one of whether democracy is conducive to a more redistributive and inclusive social policy or not, and whether authoritarianism limits the scope of such policy (Haggard and Kaufman 2008, 13). The empirical evidence in the book shows a highly mixed pattern, and the authors recognize that the data do not support an unequivocal answer to this question. They deal with this ambiguity by emphasizing the importance of *ceteris paribus* conditions when tracing the influence of democracy, and claim that if a natural experiment was possible, they would expect democracy to have a positive effect on welfare (p. 361-362). *Ceteris paribus* argument also helps the authors to deal with deviant Eastern European cases that do not fit the expectation of authoritarian rule to preclude the development of welfare policies<sup>12</sup>. In this region authoritarian regimes created quite extensive welfare programs, and the authors explain it by the “nature of underlying political alignments and development strategies” (p. 72-73) and “political and ideological commitments to a socialist transformation” (p. 357). At the end of the introduction to the book, though, the authors recognize that “(t)he research program on welfare and social policy needs to broaden its horizon beyond the democratic cases, to consider whether the benefits of democracy hold, if not why not, and under which conditions authoritarian regimes may be responsive to the interests of the poor. Such a research project would join the historical work on the European welfare state with the consideration of the developing and socialist systems we consider here” (p. 24).

The second study is by Cook (2007), where she explores the social policy in postcommunist Russia and compares it to four other countries situated in different places along the democratic-authoritarian continuum. Hungary and Poland represent more democratic cases, and Kazakhstan and Belarus serve as more authoritarian ones. The author finds that “(d)emocratic representation and bargaining in Poland and Hungary *have* mattered for maintaining welfare expenditures and moderating liberalization, although their influence is much weaker than in Western Europe” (p. 8). As for

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<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere, Haggard and Kaufman (2009, 225) also associate welfare under authoritarian rule in Eastern Europe with crisis-driven “path-departing moves”, implying that “the path” is associated with democracy.

authoritarian cases, she argues that the influence of bureaucratic-statist welfare interests and their place in executive coalitions were the key factors influencing the different welfare outcomes in the two countries. In Kazakhstan the executive's power was increasingly based in the private energy economy. Welfare and other state bureaucracies were politically marginalized, which led to privatization of the public sector and significant reduction of welfare effort. In Belarus, conversely, the inherited statist-bureaucratic structures remained strong, forming the base of presidential power and leading to extended welfare effort. Cook recognizes, though, that Belarus is a deviant case characterized by weak societal influence combined with the extensive welfare state and comparatively strong welfare effort, and this combination is not well handled by the explanations suggested in the book.

As for Russia, the main case in the study, Cook divides the post-Soviet period into three stages, where the first one (1991-1993) was characterized by non-negotiated liberalization, the second one (1994-1999) by contested liberalization, and the third one (2000-2004) by liberalization negotiated within the elite. The last period is exactly the one with a more authoritarian political regime, and the author argues that during this time the influence on welfare state change was confined to state bureaucratic actors and social-sector elites who held narrowly conceived commitments to preserving their roles in welfare administration. Generally, the explanations of authoritarian cases revolve around the role of state bureaucracy and its parts in the distribution of the state resources.

These two studies clearly show that although the well-developed theoretical apparatus of the democratic welfare state makes possible some valuable insights about the cases with hybrid political regimes, it struggles with the explanation of the authoritarian side of things. In relation to authoritarian cases Haggard and Kaufman do describe patterns distinct from the democratic ones, but they stay isolated theoretically and are treated as deviant. Cook is more consistent as she uses different tools for the democratic and authoritarian cases or periods. In relation to democracies she attends to the power balances in the parliaments and governments as well as the party configurations. In relation to

authoritarian cases, where the party competition is absent or not important, she looks at the role of state bureaucracies, which is essentially the application of the state-centered approach. These tools, however, still leave a number of things unexplained, particularly the variation among the authoritarian cases as recognized by the author.

Using the theoretical apparatus developed for democratic countries also leaves alternative or additional hypotheses not tested. For example, the authors do not talk much about the preferences of authoritarian elites. What kind of people were they? Would they have gone for power or for money? What was the role of state- and nation-building motives in the elite's preferences and the popular sentiments? What kind of developmental considerations did the elites have? What was the character of popular protest: was it backed by a strong social movement or orchestrated from above? How did welfare dynamics play into the state legitimacy? Exploration of such questions would have helped to draw a much more nuanced picture for authoritarian cases and make them a base for theory building rather than marginal deviations from the mainstream.

### **Conclusion: Why should Western scholars theorize the authoritarian welfare state?**

In conclusion let me address several reasons of why Western scholars should theorize the authoritarian welfare state. This is not immediately obvious since welfare states in capitalist democracies are still best explained by the already existing democratic theories and not by the sketches of the authoritarian theory that exist to date. Given that Western scholars are mostly interested in Western countries, the weak interest in theorizing the authoritarian welfare state may seem justified.

I suggest that there are three main reasons for Western scholars to develop a theory of the authoritarian welfare state. First, Western, particularly English-speaking, social science has an enormous

influence on social science worldwide. Although Western social science is concentrated on Western societies, North American and European universities are regarded as world leaders in research. Scholars from other countries as well as Western scholars studying other parts of the world cannot ignore existing democratic theories and frequently use them as a frame for their research. Western social science, therefore, often functions as a global one. This state of affairs is widely criticized, and many scholars point at the inadequacy of Western theories when applied to non-Western world. Retaining the position of world leader will require Western social science to become more global and more inclusive in terms of its empirical basis. Authoritarian political regimes have historically preceded democratic ones, and continue to outnumber democracies even today. They also do develop and implement welfare policies even if to a smaller extent than their democratic counterparts. A truly global social science cannot afford the ignorance of such a widespread phenomenon.

Theorizing the authoritarian welfare state will also help to correct the existing bias in studying the countries with hybrid political regimes. Using a theory alternative to the democratic one is particularly important not to misunderstand the direction of social transformations in these countries. Just like protests are not necessarily a sign of democratization, expansion of the welfare state may or may not be an indicator of democratic transformations. Testing alternative – democratic and authoritarian – hypotheses should become a common practice for students of hybrid regimes.

Second, incorporating authoritarian welfare states into theory does not mean a simple extension of geography. It will help to widen the definition of the welfare state beyond its connection to civil rights, which will have a direct impact on how it is understood in democracies. In particular, it will add the elements of social control into the understanding of the welfare state, and will do it in a convincing way. Authoritarian cases provide a much better empirical base than democracies for demonstrating the social control function of welfare and the role of the state in developing of welfare

policies<sup>13</sup>. Although the elements of these phenomena can be traced in democracies, the need for constant defense against democratically-based explanations does not allow elaboration of these parts of the theory in a study based on democratic cases. It is no wonder that the only attempt to conceptualize welfare as a means of social control by Piven and Cloward (1993) drew so much criticism: the United States is simply not the best case to develop such an argument in a convincing way.

Once the concept and the theory of the authoritarian welfare state are more developed and tested in comparative studies, they may find connections with other theories that deal with control functions of social policy. In particular, it may have a conversation with feminist theory that highlights the functions of welfare in preserving the patriarchal social order (Orloff 1993). Likewise, the theory of the authoritarian welfare state will probably be useful to understand the experience of Western states as colonizers (Midgley and Piachaud 2011).

The third reason brings us back to politics. I mentioned at the beginning of the paper that one of the possible reasons for ignoring the authoritarian welfare state in theory building is the political cleavages and the appropriation of the authoritarian welfare state agenda by conservative politicians. It is true that studies of the authoritarian welfare state may be misinterpreted by politicians, but ignoring the issue is hardly a better answer. A deeper understanding of how welfare works in democratic and authoritarian context will most certainly help liberally-minded academics develop a more elaborated argument against conservatives. It will help to see how social policies may restrict freedoms, and identify the mechanisms of preventing that. Finally, it will help to prove one more time that in a real democratic struggle it is the rights that are at stake, not the particular economic benefits, which may be provided in exchange for rights, and that real development lies in freedom rather than in economy (Sen 1999).

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<sup>13</sup> Skocpol and Orloff recognize that an analytic agenda concentrated on states is probably most relevant to “special sort of nations – monarchies, late industrializers, and embattled Israel – where state authorities have necessarily had “abnormally” large roles to play in social-welfare politics” (Skocpol and Orloff 1986, 238).

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